

Birthplace Cabin & Farm

DRAWER 3 - BIRTH-KENTUCKY

71 1009. 1850-1865



# Abraham Lincoln before 1860

## Birthplace Cabin and Farm

Excerpts from newspapers and other  
sources

From the files of the  
Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection

# LINCOLN LORE

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FORT WAYNE, INDIANA

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## A CABIN OF UNIVERSAL FAME

The log cabin in which Abraham Lincoln was born has become the best known home in all the universe. No structure where a man of any nation has dwelt is more quickly recognized by people the world around than the house of logs in which Abraham Lincoln first saw the light of day.

On February 12, 1909, President Theodore Roosevelt visited the birthplace of Abraham Lincoln in order to take part in a program which launched the project looking to the preservation of the Lincoln cabin. On June 14, 1936, President Franklin Roosevelt made a journey to the same place, not to deliver an address, but to visit the humble cabin much as a private citizen to gain inspiration at the shrine. Year by year outstanding world citizens from many nations make the pilgrimage to the birthplace of Abraham Lincoln.

The original Lincoln cabin itself once went on a lengthy itinerary, having been shown at the Tennessee Centennial at Nashville, Tennessee, and in many of the large cities of the country. On the one hundredth anniversary of Lincoln's birth in 1909, it was returned to its original site. As the cabin is no longer available for exhibition purposes the next best method of allowing the general public to get a glimpse of what the birthplace of Lincoln was like is to construct replicas of it. Many of these have been erected throughout the country and even Denmark has built a Lincoln cabin in one of her parks. In 1920 The Lincoln National Life Insurance Company erected a replica of the cabin in Foster Park at Fort Wayne, Indiana. Three years later Miss Mary Bowditch Forbes built a Lincoln cabin on her estate at Milton, Massachusetts. Both of these log houses are built to the exact specifications of the Hodgenville cabin now preserved in the beautiful memorial structure there.

The Fort Wayne Lincoln cabin has recently been rebuilt in a more favorable location near the entrance of Foster Park. It is surrounded on three sides by a typical pioneer rail fence and the landscaping has been arranged to harmonize with a cabin home. The furnishings for the cabin were ob-

tained in Kentucky in the county where Abraham Lincoln was born.

Many requests have come to the Lincoln National Life Foundation from Boy Scout Troops and other organizations for information which would be helpful in building a replica of the cabin. This issue of Lincoln Lore presents sufficient instructions for the building of an accurate replica of the Lincoln cabin.

### Foundation

Field stones were used under the foundation logs although sometimes large stones supporting the four corners of the cabin and the four corners of the chimney were all that were required.

### General Plan

The cabin is 17 ft. x 13 ft., outside measurements, with a door 5 ft. 8 in. by 2 ft. 8 in. and a window 2 ft. square in the front wall of the structure. On the left side wall is an opening for the fireplace and a log and stick chimney 6 ft. 6 in. wide and 3 ft. 11 in. deep. The back and right walls of the cabin are without openings.

### Front Wall

The front wall is eleven logs high to the eaves. To make room for door and windows several logs of different lengths are necessary. Log Measurements follow:

|                           |                  |
|---------------------------|------------------|
| 1 log .....               | 19 ft.           |
| 4 logs .....              | 17 ft.           |
| 6 logs .....              | 7 ft. 7 in.      |
| 4 logs .....              | 6 ft. 9 in.      |
| 2 logs .....              | 3 ft.            |
| 2 logs .....              | 1 ft. 9 in.      |
| Door casing, overall...   | 2 ft. 8 in. wide |
|                           | 5 ft. 8 in. high |
| Window casing, overall... | 2 ft. square     |

### Right Side Wall

The right side wall is ten logs high including the long eave log. Above the eave are three more logs which complete the gable. Log Measurements follow:

|              |             |
|--------------|-------------|
| 1 log .....  | 15 ft.      |
| 9 logs ..... | 13 ft.      |
| 1 log .....  | 9 ft. 6 in. |
| 1 log .....  | 5 ft. 6 in. |
| 1 log .....  | 2 ft. 6 in. |

### Back Wall

The back wall is plain with all logs the same length except the eave log which extends out on each end 12 inches beyond the rest of the back logs. Log Measurements follow:

|               |        |
|---------------|--------|
| 1 log .....   | 19 ft. |
| 10 logs ..... | 17 ft. |

### Left Side Wall

The fireplace is cut out of the left wall. The sixth log directly over the fireplace is the first one to extend the full length of the side wall. There are four more full length logs including the eave log and three shorter ones in the gable. Log Measurements follow:

|              |             |
|--------------|-------------|
| 1 log .....  | 15 ft.      |
| 4 logs ..... | 13 ft.      |
| 5 logs ..... | 4 ft. 3 in. |
| 1 log .....  | 9 ft. 6 in. |
| 1 log .....  | 5 ft. 6 in. |
| 1 log .....  | 2 ft. 6 in. |

### Chimney

The chimney against the left wall is five logs high in back and six logs high on each side. On top of these logs smaller sticks are used to build the chimney tapering off until they reach the height of the ninth side log of the cabin. (The chimney may be extended to the roof.) Log Measurements follow:

|                    |                            |
|--------------------|----------------------------|
| 12 logs .....      | 4 ft. 10 in.               |
| 5 logs .....       | 6 ft. 6 in.                |
| 30 sticks from ... | 6 ft. 6 in. to 3 ft. 3 in. |

### Roof

The roof consists of five poles besides the two eave logs of the walls, and on these, three courses of hand madeingles are placed. These shingles are held on by an extra ridge pole and three more poles extending across the roof where the courses of shingles join. Pole Measurements follow:

|                                                                   |             |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|
| 12 poles .....                                                    | 19 ft. long |
| Sufficient hand made shingles for 3 courses on each side of roof. |             |

### Picture Available

The Lincoln National Life Foundation will be pleased to furnish a picture of the cabin to any group which anticipates building a replica.

# IN PERSPECTIVE

## Where Lincoln Was Born

In West Central Kentucky, 50 miles south of Louisville, the small village of Hodgenville stands seemingly undistinguished. To the casual observer there is nothing that appears to differentiate this quiet town from any other village of its size. But suddenly the motorist on the well-traveled highway is aware of the village green that looms before him. If he is a stranger to the place, he slackens the speed of his car.

For there before his eyes stands an impressive memorial to Abraham Lincoln. It is the Weinman statue, fashioned by the pupil of St. Gaudens, which Robert T. Lincoln pronounced a "noble statue" of his father. The martyred President is seated in a great chair atop the granite base. His hands rest easily on the arms of the chair. His head, slightly bowed, and the features of his gaunt face so finely drawn reflect earnest meditation.

Hodgenville is commonly known as the birthplace of Lincoln. But actually he was born on a farm about three miles south of the village. Thus it was this warm June day Mrs. P.E.M. and I drove slowly through the gateway that opens on a tree-studded grassy plot of ground.

One descends several steps leading from the parking area, follows a grass-bordered walk a short distance, and then finds himself in a beautifully landscaped amphitheater. Under the hot summer sun of this late June day I noticed that the American flag atop the tall flag pole hung quite listlessly, untouched by any wind. But summer heat and breezeless day are quickly forgotten as one turns his gaze toward the hilltop and beholds the splendid memorial building that houses the Lincoln cabin. It is constructed of Connecticut pink granite and Tennessee marble. The structure is architecturally beautiful. It has classic simplicity, emphasized by the half dozen massive granite columns that support the roof over the patio entrance.

\* \* \*

In the approach to the building one climbs a series of wide granite steps, some 50 or 60 altogether. Nothing could be better calculated to induce a leisurely and reverent approach. One passes slowly through the open portals and finds himself immediately in the subdued light of the interior. There in utter solitariness stands the rude cabin, its time-worn logs chinked with ancient plaster. The single door is open. The lone window, as in Lincoln's babyhood, has no glass. The huge fireplace at one end—the left as one faces the doorway from outside—was obviously built to consume large pieces of logs. The rough earthen floor is in the old Kentucky tradition.

Some doubt still exists, as presumably it always will, that this is the very self-same cabin in which Lincoln was born. The preponderance of evidence, painstakingly gathered by competent searchers through many years, indicates that it is the original structure which Thomas and Nancy Hanks Lincoln built before their child Abraham was born. But some conflicting testimony of less positive character, given many years ago and drawn from childhood recollections by two or three persons in old age, raises some doubt.

To me the lack of positive proof beyond all challenge seems unimportant. For certainly the cabin in all respects is indisputably like dozens of other log cabins built in the same region in the years preceding and following Lincoln's birth. They were all alike as peas in a pod, even to their exact dimensions and their single room and their glassless window and their great fireplace.

\* \* \*

Whether these are the four walls within which Lincoln was born or whether his birth actually occurred in an identical structure of rough-hewn timbers is not very consequential. The significant fact, unchallenged by anyone, is that he was born in such a rude log cabin and spent his babyhood here, as indeed his childhood in an identical cabin up on Knob Creek a few miles distant, in just such bare and hard existence as the old familiar Lincoln stories tell. The truth is obvious to anyone who looks inside the cabin. Here in one's very presence is the living symbol both of Lincoln's early poverty and the meagreness of his opportunity.

One walks reverently around the four sides of the simple structure and then turns his gaze to the inscriptions on the interior walls of the sheltering granite and marble memorial building. There is the letter Lincoln wrote in 1859 when he was asked for a brief biographical sketch for campaign purposes. "There was absolutely nothing," he wrote of his boyhood, "to excite ambition for education. Of course, when I came of age I did not know much. Still, somehow, I could read, write, and cipher to the rule of three, but that was all. I have not been to school since."

There too on an inscribed panel are the lines of Maurice Thompson. I read them again carefully.

He was the North, the South, the East,  
the West,

The thrall, the master, all of us in  
one;

There was no section that he held the  
best;

His love shown as impartial as the  
sun;

And so revenge appealed to him in vain,  
He smiled at it, as at a thing forlorn,  
And gently put it from him, rose and  
stood

A moment's space in pain,  
Remembering the prairies and the corn  
And the glad voices of the field and  
wood.

P. E. M.

Rev, J.W.Cunningham who was one of the earliest Lincoln Historians in Hardin County and who contributed many articles to the press of that town and the Louisville Papers, was of the opinion that Abraham Lincoln Sr settled at Haycraft's fort in what is now Elizabethtown, Haycraft's fort was one of three block houses occupying elevations overlooking The Valley as Elizabethtown is first called, One of the other forts or block houses was built by Captain ~~xxxx~~ Thomas Helm. On this site today stands the mansion in which Governor John L. Helm died. ~~This xxxxxxxxxx~~ The other established by Colonel Hynes, for whose wife the town was named, and ~~xxxxxxx~~ on which site at a later date stood the home of the Geofnegans which we have met in Lincoln History. These three forts formed a triangle with the forts at the apexes a mile apart.

I shall use Mr. Cunningham's own words ~~in describing the~~ copied from the Elizabethtown news of Sept. 18, 1903, in presenting his story of the establishment of the first Lincoln Home in Kentucky "Not far from town and included within its limits, was "The Haycraft" where Haycraft's fort stood, within whose protecting stockade Abraham Lincoln's grandfather and his family found a refuge from savage bands which made occasional visits to that section. By one of those bands the paternal Lincoln lost his life in the neighboring wild woods. When I first knew the place there was an old log house with two principle rooms, and smaller ones in the rear. " Evidently this story had been handed down to Mr. Cunningham from the preceding generation, and had gained circulation before the biographies of Lincoln began to appear.

I was born in 1854 in a log house on the old Cave Spring Farm, a short distance from the cabin in which Abraham Lincoln was born. I often went with my father to the old Brownfield Mill which was about two miles from our home and near the town of Buffalo. On one of these trips when about ten years old my father pointed out to me the dilapidated old cabin which he said was occupied by Thomas Lincoln and his wife, before they moved onto the farm on which we lived. I remember that he said that they came from Washington County to this place, and that this was their first home in what was then Hardin County, and that after staying in the Brownfield cabin for one season they moved into the cabin where Abraham Lincoln was born.

The Brownfield cabin as I remember it was located just across the creek from the old mill at the edge of an old crab apple grove. I remember about the cabin itself as that it was about 40 feet fallen down with the exception of the stone chimney. It must have been one of those cabins where part of the chimney the base was constructed of stone, and part of sticks as many of the old cabins were built in that way.

The mill was old when I was a boy and had been repaired at that early date. It was what was known as an overshot wheel mill and there was a head pond just above it about 100 ft in diameter, and a race way below that led back into the ~~creek~~ creek which was known as Beaver Dam Creek. The mill continued to be used up until about the time that the property passed out of the Brownfield family in 1890.

Another interesting feature which I remember about the place was an old crab apple orchard of natural growth which resembled very much a plum thicket. There must have been as much as four acres of the orchard and it was known throughout the surrounding country. During the apple season people would come from long distances to gather these apples. The Brownfield cabin was at the edge of this thicket.

The approach to the mill from our home was somewhat different to the road running into Buffalo to day, and it was called the Old Mill road. It left the present Jackson Highway about one half mile from Buffalo and followed the ridge in a more direct line to the mill. Another road to the south of the mill led to the Turnpike.

*R. W. Neal*

## The Lincoln Cabin

Extract from  
Letter written by Rev. W.T.Davenport to Rev. John W. Cunningham.

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"My mothers farm was just one mile and a half from the Lincoln Farm. Dr. George Rodman, now dead, was our old family doctor for years and often told us that he once owned our farm, that he bought the old Lincoln Cabin and had it moved to where it was then standing. It was there as a tenant house and was never used as a meat or smoke house. When I was on the Buffalo Mission 1862-3 we boarded with my mother and my wife taught a subscription school in the the old Lincoln Cabin. Others taught in it after her. When my brother was married he repaired the old cabin made some addition to it. lived in it and three of his children were born in it. He was living in it when he sold it to the Lincoln Association. and built a nice two story house for the money he got for the Lincoln Cabin. I am not able to give dates as to when the Lincoln Cabin was moved. Grandmother Coff nearly ninety years old lived with her son adjoining the Lincoln Farm. She has a loom and a reel which her father bought at the sale of Tom Lincoln when he moved away and it is still in use.

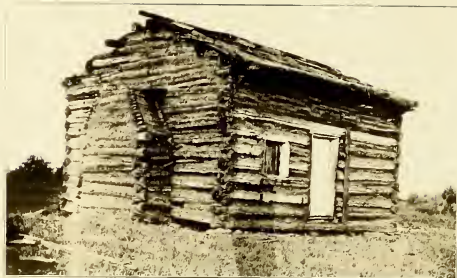
W.T.Davenport "



*Christmas at Lincoln's Birthplace*

MADE IN U.S.A.

A. Bright and Merry Christmas to You



THE BIRTHPLACE OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN  
N. of the branch, 1 mi. S. of Eminence, Kentucky

RICHARD MATHER.

Richard Mather was a resident of the Barren Run section of Hardin(now LaRue) County from about the year 1803 until his death, twenty years later. According to family tradition, he was a native of Manchester, England. So far as known, he was not related to the colonial family of Mathers in New England, though the immigrant ancestor of the Boston divines, Increase and Cotton, who was also a Richard Mather, was from the same shire or county in England in which the city of Manchester is located. The writer of this sketch has been informed by a resident of Manchester that the name Mather is of common occurrence in that city. It is said to be de-



THE BIRTHPLACE OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN  
near Haverhill, in New England, America.

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In early life the Kentucky Richard Mather was engaged in mercantile pursuits. For several years after coming to America—seven according to one statement and seventeen according to another—he was a merchant and importer in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He may have been a resident of that city at the time he first purchased real estate in Kentucky, in the year 1798. But according to deeds which are recorded in Deed Book "A", Hardin County, he was a resident of New York City in the year 1800. A mortgage by John Dowhurst, "Gentleman", to Richard Mather, "Merchant", of New York City, dated April 26, 1800, securing a debt of \$661.00, is on file with the papers in the suit of Mather against Dowhurst, which was instituted in the year 1813 in Hardin County.

Richard Mather came to Kentucky probably about the first of the year 1802, but he did not locate immediately on the lands in Hardin County which he had purchased. A deed recorded in the Hardin County Court Clerk's office, dated June 7, 1802, shows that he was then a resident of Scott County, Kentucky. At the time he located in Scott County he was a widower, with one child, a daughter, named Eliza, who became the wife of a man named Clark. This daughter never came to Hardin County to reside. While a resident of Scott County, Richard Mather married his second wife. A deed dated January 2, 1804, recorded in Deed Book "B", page 458, Hardin County,

shows Richard Mather and Mary Mather, his wife, as residents of Hardin County. Owing to the fact that the records of Scott County were destroyed by fire about the year 1835, the date of this second marriage cannot be given; and for the same reason no account can be given of any real estate in Scott County which may have been owned by Richard Mather.

Shortly after his removal to Hardin County, Richard Mather erected a residence on the 15,000-acre tract of land which had been allotted to him in the division with the heirs of John Hood, which division will be mentioned later. This residence was in the edge of the "barrens", near the western end of the 15,000-acre tract, in the immediate vicinity of the settlement now known as "Tanner". Here he spent the remainder of his life. During his lifetime he sold most of the two large boundaries of land to which he had obtained title. As a rule, as in the case of the "Sinking Spring" (Lincoln birthplace) farm, sales were made by "title bond", or contract to convey, written by Richard Mather himself in clear and legible handwriting. From the fact that many purchasers had not paid for their bonds at the time of Richard Mather's death, and hence were not then entitled to deeds, many suits were filed in the courts of Hardin, Hart and LaRue counties against his heirs, to obtain deeds to lands for which title bonds were held, and deeds were made by commissioners of the courts.

The death of Richard Mather occurred on the 17th day of April, 1823. He was buried in the family burying ground a short distance back of his home. His wife, Mary, survived until May 7, 1848, and was buried by his side.

The children of this couple were six, namely-

- (1) Mariah-~~born~~ September 18, 1804, died May 8, 1863-  
married Samuel Brashear;
- (2) Henry-born 1807; died 1846, while holding the office  
of Deputy Sheriff of LaRue County and the first  
Sheriff of the county-married Lucretia Walters;
- (3) James C.-married Nancy McIntire;
- (4) Edward L.-Married-Died in Wellington, Kansas, about  
1884;

(5) Gary~~born~~ 1812, died about 1875-married Ellen Kirkpatrick;

(6) Ann Gabriella-born March 6, 1815, died September 3, 1877-married William T. Lewis.

The appraisement of the personal estate, of Richard Mather, dated January 23, 1824, and recorded in the office of the Clerk of Hardin county Court, was made by ~~four~~<sup>four</sup> of his near neighbors, namely, Thomas T. Owsley, Ellsworth<sup>A</sup> Owsley, Nathaniel Catlett and William Morrison.

The historic interest which in recent years has been attracted to a portion of the real estate in Kentucky to which Richard Mather acquired title warrants special mention of his lands in Hardin County.

On the 20th day of February, 1786, William Greenough, of the city of Philadelphia, obtained patents from the Commonwealth of Virginia for two large boundaries of land lying in that part of Jefferson County which in the year 1793 became Hardin County. One of these boundaries contained 30,000 acres and was described as located "on the southern branches of Holin"; the other contained 60,000 acres lying in the headwaters of the southern branches of Holin, Brush Creek and Lynn Camp. These two boundaries were several miles apart. The greater part of the 60,000 acre tract is within the present boundaries of Hart and Green counties, while the 30,000-acre tract is wholly within the county of Laine.

On the 25th day of July, 1786, Greenough conveyed a one-half interest in the 30,000-acre tract to John Roof and the other half interest to Joseph James, "of the city of New York". On the 11th of June, 1796, James sold his half interest in this tract to Richard Mather.

On the 16th day of June, 1786, William Greenough sold to John Newmarst, of New York City, 30,000 acres, or one-half, of the 60,000-acre boundary; and on October 1, 1791, Newmarst sold to William Weymouth, who, on the 28th day of December, 1802, sold this 30,000 acres, lying on the southern branches of Holin, Brush Creek and Lynn Camp, to Richard Mather and George Johnson. By deed

which was recorded in the office of the Clerk of Hardin County Court on January 20, 1820, the heirs of William Greenough, by Samuel Hayscraft, Jr., as Commissioner, conveyed to Richard Mather the whole of the 30,000 acres "on head of the southern branches of Nolin, Brush Creek and Lynn Camp", pursuant to terms of the title bond given by Greenough to Dewhurst on June 15, 1786, of which it would appear Mather had become sole holder. Further account of changes of title of this tract of 30,000 acres is unnecessary; but the 30,000 acres "on the southern branches of Nolin", in which Richard Mather obtained a one-half interest by purchase from Joseph James on June 11, 1798, as stated above, is especially interesting, because out of the 15,000 acres which was later allotted to Richard Mather as his share of this 30,000-acre boundary the farm was carved on which Abraham Lincoln was born. Also, the Richard Creal farm, on Beaver Dam branch of the South Fork of Nolin, near the present town of Buffalo, which was the birthplace of Dennis Hanks, Lincoln's second cousin, was a part of Mather's share of this 30,000-acre tract. The traditional "plum orchard", in which Thomas Lincoln is said to have lived from about May, 1803, until he purchased the "Sinking Spring" <sup>place</sup> in December following, which is said to have been the property of George Brownfield at that time, was probably identical with the "peach orchard" on the Creal place, where Dennis Hanks was born. As shown below, George Brownfield later purchased a portion of the Creal place, but not until after the birth of Abraham Lincoln.

In proceedings which were instituted by Richard Mather in the year 1801, in the Hardin County Court, commissioners were appointed to divide the 30,000 acre tract lying on the southern branches of Nolin between Mather and the heirs of John Hood. In 1802 these commissioners ran a division line and Mather was allotted the northern half, 15,000 acres; but deed was not made to him until 1814. This deed is recorded in Deed Book ~~46~~ "F", page 172, Hardin County. In a suit which was filed by the representatives of Hood, and was appealed to the Court of Appeals of Kentucky, this

deed was held to be void, as ~~that~~ appears from judgment of the Court of Appeals in 2 A.K. Marshall's Reports, page 675 (decided October 17, 1820). But, as shown by deed of Richard Mather and wife of date October 1, 1821, recorded in Hardin County Court Clerk's office in Deed Book No. "E", page 206, the division as made by the commissioners was ratified and approved, and the titles of purchasers from Richard Mather of various portions of the 15,000 acres which had been allotted to him were validated. Among these purchasers <sup>was</sup> ~~was~~ Richard Grell, whose tract contained 100 acres, of which a portion was sold to George Brownfield on July 5, 1810, though Brownfield did not obtain a deed until the year 1836, as shown by deed recorded in "Circuit Court Deed Book No. 2" page 368, Hardin County. Another purchaser from Mather was David Vance, who obtained title bond for the 500 acres known as the "Sinking Spring" place, which bond he assigned to Isaac Eush, who transferred his rights to Thomas Lincoln in December, 1808. On the "Sinking Spring" place Abraham Lincoln, sixteenth President of the United States, was born February 12, 1809.

(Written by O. M. Mather  
for Hardin County Historical  
Society, Apr. 2, 1886)



# Abraham Lincoln Birthplace

National Historic Site  
Kentucky

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

Official Map and Guide



# Abraham Lincoln Birthplace

National Historic Site  
Kentucky  
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Official Map and Guide



*I was born Feb. 12, 1809, in Hardin County, Kentucky.*

Abraham Lincoln, passionate defender of the Union and the man whose life and ideals affirmed the dignity of working people, was a product of the austere society of frontier Kentucky. After Lincoln had grown to adulthood and prospered as a lawyer and politician, he was reluctant to talk about what he called the "stinted living" of his early years. When he was asked for a campaign biography, he responded: "It can all be condensed into a simple sentence, and that sentence you will find in Gray's Elegy—The short and simple annals of the poor." He did, however, furnish the information, and almost everything we know of Lincoln's childhood was contained in his remembrances.

Before the Lincolns came into Kentucky, the ancestors of our 16th president had a long and restless history in colonial America. Generation after generation had left their fathers' homes and moved westward in search of more land and fewer constraints. The first American Lincoln, Samuel, sailed from the west of England in 1637 and settled in Hingham, Mass. His descendants moved on to fertile land in New Jersey and then Pennsyl-

vania, and in 1768, John Lincoln and his family of ten migrated into Virginia. One of John's sons and Lincoln's grandfather, Abraham, reached the edge of the frontier, settling in the Shenandoah Valley.

By 1782, Abraham had sold his farm and, with his wife Bersheba and five children, had struck out for the Kentucky wilderness. Daniel Boone had blazed the first trail into this unknown region only seven years earlier. It was still a rugged, uncharted territory, the Dark and Bloody Ground of Indian warfare, but it offered rich bottom lands for farming. Possibly as a result of Boone's own urging, Abraham entered Kentucky through Cumberland Gap and settled near the present site of Louisville. In May 1786, as he and his children worked in the newly planted fields, Abraham was killed in an Indian raid. Ten-year-old Thomas, future father of a president, remained with his father's body and was saved from death at the last moment when one of his brothers shot an approaching Indian.

After Abraham's death, Bersheba and the children moved to what is now Washington County. Ken-

tucky, a more secure and populated area. Lincoln later wrote that Thomas, "by the early death of his father, and very narrow circumstances of his mother, even in childhood was a wandering laborer, and grew up literally without education."

Uneducated he was, but he never deserved the ne'er-do-well reputation he had with early Lincoln biographers. He was an honest, reasonably industrious man, not shiftless but without driving ambition. He fulfilled the duties of a frontier citizen, serving as a militiaman and county guard of prisoners, paying his taxes, and sitting on juries. On at least one occasion he labored alongside slaves, which may have helped shape his anti-slavery views.

After years of roaming up and down Kentucky, Thomas moved with his family to Hardin County in 1803. Settling in Elizabethtown, he learned the carpenter's trade and was good enough at it to purchase a 230-acre farm. Thomas saved his money and in 1806 married a young woman named Nancy Hanks and brought her back to Elizabethtown.

Photography by M. L. McCoy

## Simple Beginnings

In December 1808, Thomas and Nancy bought the Sinking Spring farm, paying \$200 for 348 acres of stony land on Nolin Creek. The couple's first child, Sarah, was a year old, and as they moved 14 miles southwest to their new home, Nancy was expecting another. The life of this

young frontier woman is shadowy. Lincoln remembered her fondly, but we know only that she was born in Virginia, was illiterate, and died shortly after the Lincolns left Kentucky. For historian Albert J. Beveridge, she remains "dim as the dream of a shifting mirage . . . her face and figure waver through the mists of time and rumor."

Sinking Spring Farm's red clay was not noted for its fertility. The farm stood on the edge of the Barrens, a great tract of land made treeless by Indian fires set to create grazing land for game. Perhaps the Lincolns bought it because it was closer to Nancy's relatives and only 3 miles south of Hodgson's mill.

Thomas, Nancy, and their infant daughter moved into a one-room log cabin built on a knoll near Sinking Spring. The Lincolns' cabin was probably a typical frontier dwelling, about 18 by 16 feet, a dirt floor, one window and one door, a small fireplace, a shingled roof, and a low chimney made of clay, straw, and hard wood. The tiny window opening might have been covered with greased paper, animal skin, or an old quilt to keep out

summer insects and the cold winter wind.

The winter deepened as Nancy's time drew near. On Sunday, February 12, 1809, she lay close to the fire on her bed of corn husks and bear skins, and the family, in the words of Carl Sandburg, "welcomed into a world of battle and blood, of whispering dreams and wistful dust, a new child, a boy." The boy was named Abraham, after his grandfather.

Thomas and Nancy Lincoln and their children lived the self-sufficient life of a frontier farm family. Thomas continued to do a little carpentry and cabinet-making, but he was now a farmer. He spent long hours behind the plow and tramping through the woods with his rifle in search of meat. Nancy cooked plain food—bread, corn, pork



*Thomas Lincoln  
for  
Nancy Lincoln*

The Lincolns' family Bible

—In her Dutch oven and long-handled frying pan. The Lincolns' life was spare, but they were not poverty-stricken. They owned two farms, a lot in Elizabethtown, and livestock. They were members in good standing of their community.

As Abraham grew from infancy, a young oak sapling grew near the Lincolns' cabin. Until its death in 1976, the Boundary Oak was a living vestige of the quiet farm where Lincoln spent the first two years of his life.

Statue of Abraham Lincoln  
Hodgesville Ky



**Knob Creek Farm**  
In 1811, the Lincolns moved 10 miles east to a farm on Knob Creek, where the soil was richer. Lincoln's earliest memory was of this farm, helping his father plant pumpkin seeds among the corn. There

Interior of a replica of the Lincoln cabin at Knob Creek



the boy got his first taste of education in Caleb Hazel's "ABC school," or as Lincoln called it, a "sabbath school," for the constant recitation. Lincoln's views on slavery may have been formed at Knob Creek, as Hazel was an outspoken emancipationist, and the Lincolns belonged

to an anti-slavery church. Life was better there, but the slavery issue and lawsuits over the titles to his farms induced Thomas to move to Indiana. In late 1816 the Lincoln family crossed the Ohio to the land where the child shaped in Kentucky grew to manhood.

# Visiting the Park



The cabin before its placement inside the Memorial Building

Almost 100 years after Thomas Lincoln moved from Sinking Spring Farm, a log cabin originally accepted as the birthplace cabin was placed in the Memorial Building. Although its early history is obscure, extensive research suggests that the cabin displayed in the Memorial Building is probably not the birthplace cabin of Abraham Lincoln. New York businessman A. W. Dennett purchased the Lincoln farm in 1894 and had the cabin moved to a site near the Sinking Spring. But shortly thereafter it was again dismantled and re-erected for exhibition in many cities. About 1900, Robert Collier (publisher of *Collier's Weekly*), Mark Twain, William Jennings Bryan, Samuel Gompers, and others formed the Lincoln Farm Association to preserve Lincoln's birthplace and establish a memorial to the country's 16th president. The association bought the farm in 1905 and the cabin in 1906. The group also raised over \$350,000 from more than 100,000 citizens to build a memorial to house the cabin. President Theodore Roosevelt laid the cornerstone in 1909, and two years later the marble and granite memorial, designed by John Russell Pope, was dedicated by President



Sinking Spring as it appeared when the Lincolns lived nearby

William H. Taft. The neo-classical structure in a farm setting may seem grandiose for a man who wrote, "I was born and have ever remained in the humble walks of life." But the rough cabin within the memorial dramatizes the basic values that sustained Lincoln as he led the Nation through its darkest period.

## Visiting the Park

The memorial and Sinking Spring Farm were established as a national park in 1916 and designated Abraham Lincoln Birthplace National Historic Site in 1959. The site is about 3 miles south of Hodgenville, Ky. on U.S. 31E and Ky. 61. Contact park for seasonal changes in hours of operation. Interpreters are available at the visitor center to furnish information. Groups may make advance arrangements for conducted tours.

Picnic facilities and hiking trails are provided. Camping is not permitted within the park, but camping facilities are available nearby. An environmental study area is for school use. Please leave things as you find them so others can enjoy them.

Special services and facilities are provided for handicapped visitors. Ask for information and assistance at the visitor center or from any uniformed employee.

## For Your Safety

There are numerous steps at the site, use caution. When crossing roads, be alert. Stay on the trails to avoid poison ivy and briars.

## Administration

Abraham Lincoln Birthplace National Historic Site is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. A superintendent, whose address is 2995 Lincoln Farm Road, Hodgenville, KY 42478, is in charge. (502) 358-3137



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## A Historic Walking Tour

When Thomas and Nancy Lincoln moved to Sinking Spring Farm, Kentucky had been a state for only 17 years. While there were a few frontier stores, pioneers mainly used what they could raise and what grew at hand for food, shelter, and tools. A short walk along the Forest Trail through the site of the Lincolns farm will make clear how resourceful these settlers were.

The red oaks shading the picnic area, young trees when the Lincolns lived here, remind us that much of the farm was left wooded, for the forest was as important as the farm in supplying the settlers' needs. Wild apples, wild cherries, hazel nuts, hickory nuts, and black walnuts were valuable food sources. Black walnut shells were also used to make buttons. Boiled, they yielded a black dye.

1 The smaller plants, easily overlooked today, helped make frontier life bearable. Sassafras, rose hips, and mint made good teas, and berries brightened a

monotonous diet. Salads were made of dandelions, wild lettuce, and pokeweed. Medicinal herbs took the place of drugs, and before the flax was harvested, nettles were used to make thread for weaving. Lamp wicks were fashioned from milkweed and moss.

2 Some of what has now reverted to forest was once fields, cleared by Thomas Lincoln's labor. He planted most of the land in corn, a staple of the frontier diet that was made into corn pone, corn bread, hominy, and hoe cakes. The husks were used to stuff mattresses. Corn was often converted to whiskey, a common medium of exchange on the frontier.

3 The large depression here is called Big Sink. The natural spring that flowed until the 1930s was one of the features homesteaders looked for in choosing a site.

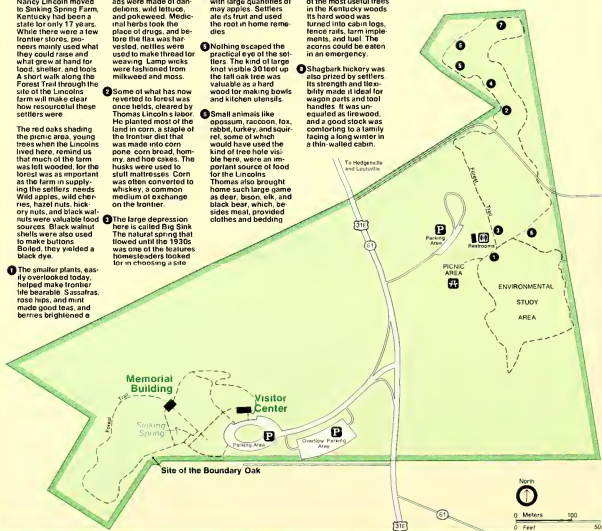
4 This area was covered with large quantities of may apples. Settlers ate its fruit and used the root in home remedies.

5 Nothing escaped the practical eye of the settlers. The kind of large knot visible 30 feet up the tall oak tree was valuable as a hard wood for making bowls and kitchen utensils.

6 Small animals like opossum, raccoon, fox, rabbit, turkey, and squirrel, some of which would have used the kind of tree hole visible here, were an important source of food for the Lincolns. Thomas also brought home such large game as deer, bison, elk, and black bear, which, besides meat, provided clothes and bedding.

7 The white oak was one of the most useful trees in the Kentucky woods. Its hard wood was turned into cabin logs, fence rails, farm implements, and fuel. The acorns could be eaten in an emergency.

8 Shagbark hickory was also prized by settlers. Its strength and flexibility made it ideal for wagon parts and tool handles. It was unequalled as firewood, and a good stock was comforting to a family facing a long winter in a thin-walled cabin.





Abraham Lincoln Birthplace, NHS  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of Interior

### SINKING SPRING

Sinking Spring, located just below the hill on which Abraham Lincoln was born, was clearly identified in early land records. This water source was variably known as Sinking Spring, Rock Spring and Cave Spring. However, early records generally refer to the landmark as Sinking Spring because the water dropped into a pit and disappeared into the earth. Thus, originated the name of the farm.

As a perennial source of water, the spring was probably a deciding factor in selecting the location for the cabin site. The Lincolns depended on this spring for their daily water supply and travelers often paused during their journey to partake of the refreshingly cool water. Abraham Lincoln probably tasted his first drink of water from this spring.

The appearance of the spring has changed considerably since the Lincoln era. The area was modified during early years of park development. However, the natural rock formations along the back wall have been changed only by nature and continue to instill impressions of a homesteader's life.

Typical of Kentucky's karst topography and hydrologic systems, the spring is a significant natural resource. Its water drains through the subsurface and empties into a branch of the Nolin river a short distance from the park. Sinking Spring is a part of a network of springs and subsurface streams in and near the park.

Because the spring's cave supports a variety of fragile cave biota, it is particularly sensitive to pollutants and encroachment. The National Park Service monitors those threats which effect the cave and its environment.

TO HELP PRESERVE THE RESOURCE, PLEASE DO NOT THROW COINS OR OTHER OBJECTS INTO THE SPRING.



Abraham Lincoln Birthplace NHS  
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#### THE BOUNDARY OAK TREE

In December 1808, Thomas Lincoln, father of Abraham, purchased the 348 acre Sinking Spring farm. On the western edge of the farm, stood a magnificent white oak tree. The tree served as a boundary marker and survey point for determining the property lines. The use of large trees, boulders and even fence lines as boundary markers was a common practice and was readily accepted.

The boundary oak was first identified as a specific boundary marker in the original 1805 survey of the farm. A landmark to countless early travelers, the Boundary Oak was located less than 150 yards from the cabin where Abraham was born in 1809. The tree was estimated to be approximately 28 years of age at Lincoln's birth.

Time, weather, insects and disease eventually claimed the white oak, however, its stump remains as the primary identifying feature of the original farm boundary. Before it's death in 1976, the Boundary Oak reached 6 feet in diameter, ninety feet in height, and had a crown spread of 115 feet.

Until it's death, the great white oak remained the "last living link" to Abraham Lincoln and was of considerable historic interest and value.







